

Western Prairie

Recreational Resources and Opportunities

This summary of significant recreation resources in the Western Prairie is substantially taken from the Western Prairie chapter of the Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin book (WDNR 2015).

Significant Recreation Resources

The WP EL has over 36,800 acres, or 5.3% of all land and water is publicly owned. This is significantly less than the statewide average of 19.5% and ranks this landscape 13th out of the 16 ELs in Wisconsin. Demand for places to recreate is high given the proximity of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Land cover, ownership, and land use patterns partly determine the types of recreation that are available to the public. In the WP, there is a much higher percentage of agricultural and grassland and a lower proportion of forest and wetland compared to the rest of the state. Resources available for land and water based public recreation:

- Over 12,500 acres of public waters
- 15,900 acres of state recreational lands
- 8,400 acres of federal lands
- Approximately 5,890 acres of State Parks
- 2,860 acres of State Natural Areas

The public lands in the WP EL offer a wide variety of recreational activities including hunting, fishing, trapping, motorized and non-motorized trail activities, paddling, camping, wildlife watching and appreciation and scenic viewing. The Willow, St. Croix and Kinnickinnic Rivers are a special draw for this area with scenic bluffs and areas for boating, nature enjoyment and fishing.

The number of recreational facilities such as lakes, trails and campgrounds in the WP is not as high as in other parts of the state. Even though there aren't as many public facilities available, the usership of the existing properties is high with over a half a million visits annually to Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks. Willow River State Park has the third highest visitation rate in the state. The WP counties have almost 570 miles of trails (motorized and non-motorized), but rank 13th out of the 16 ELs in overall trail density (miles of trail per square mile of land). Similarly, the WP ranks 15th out of the 16 ELs in both the number and density of campgrounds (both public and privately owned).



Regional Recreation Needs

A recent Recreation Opportunities Analysis (ROA) for the recreation regions encompassing the WP EL- the Mississippi River Corridor, solicited public input about popular recreation activities in these regions, as well as recreational needs and shortages, through open house meetings and online public surveys. Using the information gathered through this effort, as well as from the results of a 2016 survey about recreation participation and needs administered to a random number of Wisconsin residents as a part of the development of the 2017-2022 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the ROA identified recreation opportunities most needed in the Mississippi River Corridor Region and the potential role of DNR properties in helping to meet these needs.

Popular activities in the WP include fishing from a boat, canoe or kayak, shore fishing, hunting, hiking, harvesting berries/mushrooms, camping, bicycling, walking and running on trails, swimming, and wildlife/bird watching. In terms of recreation shortages and needs, additional opportunities for hiking, walking and running trails, bicycle trails, cross-country skiing, hunting and fishing were commonly cited as needs by respondents in this region.

The ROA used the information from both the SCORP survey and ROA public input to group most-needed recreation activities into high, medium, and low categories. The table below lists activities ranked as future recreation considerations for the WP EL.

Mississippi River Corridor Priority Recreation Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bicycling (touring and road riding)• Bicycling- mountain biking /off road biking• Bird or wildlife watching• Camping- developed and primitive• Canoeing or kayaking• Cross country skiing• Dog walking• Fishing- lake and river from a boat, canoe or kayak• Fishing- stream or river from a shore or wading• Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.• Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking• Hunting-big game• Nature photography• Participating in nature-based education programs• Picnicking• Snowshoeing• Visiting a beach, beach walking

Several properties in the WP EL may have potential to meet some of the recreational considerations listed above. The planning process will evaluate the potential and suitability of the properties to add or expand these activities to help meet future recreation needs.

